

REVIEW.

Studies in Spiritism. By AMY E. TANNER, Ph.D. (D. Appleton & Co., New York and London, 1910, pp. 408.)

MR. LANG deals above with Professor Stanley Hall's share in Dr. Tanner's book *Studies in Spiritism*. A brief notice of the book as a whole should perhaps be added.

But first let me say a few words about Mr. Lang's concluding paragraph, which it seems to me unduly depreciates Mrs. Piper's phenomena. I agree with him, as I think all who have sat with her in England do, in believing that the trance-personality hears in a normal manner through Mrs. Piper's ears, and that its impression of hearing with the hand is a matter of self-suggestion.¹ (It is a pity that Mr. Hall and Miss Tanner did not succeed in stopping the ears so as to put this beyond the possibility of question.) I also agree with Mr. Lang that answers to mental questions would greatly add to the evidence for thought-transference from the sitter, though scarcely at all, I may remark, to that for thought-transference between Mrs. Piper and other automatists, for which the evidence is in my opinion strong. But I cannot agree with his view that without answers to mental questions from the sitter experiments with Mrs. Piper are nugatory; and in this I think that most of those who have studied fully the published reports of her sittings would agree with me. Does he perhaps, like Professor Hall and Dr. Tanner, believe that the records are so incomplete that even important remarks by the sitter are omitted? Certainly at sittings at which I have been present either as manager or sitter this has not been the case. It has never been assumed by me, nor I think by other English sitters, that any remark or sound made in the room was inaudible to the trance-personality, and it surprises me that Mr. Hall and Miss Tanner should ever have

¹ Compare Mr. Myers' *Human Personality*, Vol. I., p. 192.

acted as if this were so—for instance, in the case referred to by Mr. Lang above, No. 5, p. 99. I do not know Mr. Dorr's view, but it seems to me unlikely that in telling them—if he did so—that they might talk freely to each other he meant to imply that they could count on not being heard by the trance-personality.

It does not appear that the report by Professor Hall and Dr. Tanner gives a complete account of all that happened at their six sittings, but probably what is reported is enough to enable us to form a fair judgement of the whole. Nor does it seem likely that the omission to note all their own remarks (an omission which they complain of—or perhaps too readily assume to have occurred—in the case of other sitters) has seriously, if at all, lessened the value of their sittings, which in other respects give the impression of being carefully recorded, and which form a useful addition to the material for studying Mrs. Piper's trance state. Having no interest in keeping on friendly terms with the trance-personality, they were able to use methods scarcely open to those who wish to continue experimenting—in fact, in the language of the Hodgson control, they told him “awful whoppers.” They thus induced Hodgson_r to admit comradeship and common reminiscences with Professor Hall, who says he never met Hodgson in the flesh; and they succeeded in obtaining messages from wholly fictitious friends and relations. Similarly, by substituting, unknown to the trance-personality, or at least without his betraying that he detected the imposture, other objects for Hodgson's “influences,”¹ they showed that the effect of these is probably due to suggestion, as in the case of bread pills. These results will not, I think, surprise any of the English investigators, but it is useful to have experimental demonstration of them.

Attempts to persuade Hodgson_r to deny his own identity failed completely, though I notice that Professor Hall is convinced that he could have been bluffed out of existence had the effort been persisted in (p. xxiii.). Personally, I doubt whether the most tactful handling would, in Mrs. Piper's case, induce a supposed communicator to deny the identity he claimed; but doubtless such communicators can be suppressed or encouraged by the sitters.

Mr. Hall and Miss Tanner also confirmed and extended some

¹ “Influences,” that is objects which have been in physical contact with the supposed communicator when in the body, though not a necessity, are supposed to help communication. They may serve to concentrate the attention of the trance-personality, or their use may be purely suggestive.

experiments of Dr. Hodgson's¹ showing comparative insensibility of various kinds during trance. Their attempts at Freudian psychoanalysis were incomplete and of little interest.

The accounts of the six sittings with Mrs. Piper held by Mr. Hall and Miss Tanner occupy about one fourth of the book. There is also a little chapter, interesting from a psychological point of view, called "The medium in germ," on two cases of incipient mediumship which had come under Miss Tanner's notice. The rest of the book consists of discussions of Mrs. Piper's phenomena generally, of cross-correspondences, of the evidence for telepathy furnished by the *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research and *Phantasms of the Living*, of a chapter on Mrs. Verrall, and a discussion of the Census of Hallucinations. Unfortunately brevity, hasty reading, and forgetfulness of "the tremendous influence of a preconceived theory on one's interpretations of facts" (see p. 105) very much diminish the value of what Professor Hall describes as Miss Tanner's "searching, impartial, critical estimate" (p. xxxiii). In fact her presentation of facts and arguments cannot be assumed to be fair without reference to the originals. For persons with the original accounts before them her remarks might sometimes be useful, but my impression is that they would seldom be found to add anything of value to what is put before the reader in the case as originally described, and they constantly misrepresent the case and are essentially misleading. I have not, indeed, compared the criticism with the matter criticised in all cases myself, and if I had it would obviously be impossible to follow Miss Tanner throughout within the limits of this notice. I will therefore content myself with giving a few of the instances of inaccuracy, misinterpretation or curious reasoning that have struck me in reading her book.

(a) On p. 296, in discussing "The Case of Mrs. Verrall," Miss Tanner says: "At various times the script attempted a word to be sent as a test to Dr. Hodgson, finally giving the words Ariadnes stella coronaria, and making an allusion to another constellation, Berenice's hair. Dr. Hodgson in reply said that he had thought about syringas in connexion with her script, and that syringas had a special significance for him. Now the Latin name for syringa is Philadelphus Coronarius, and the combined reference to Ariadne's crown and Berenice's hair is supposed by Mrs. Verrall to be intended to recall Philadelphus or brotherly love. This is rather far-fetched, however." I raise no objection to the abstract till we

¹ *Proceedings*, Vol. VIII., p. 4.

come to the part I have put in italics. Mrs. Verrall says nothing about brotherly love. What she does say is "that the introduction of Berenice was accounted for, if what was wanted was not only coronarius but Philadelphus"¹; and in case by chance any one should fail to remember the close association, in history, of the names Berenice and Ptolemy Philadelphus, she refers to it in a foot-note. This is not far-fetched at all.

(b) Here (pp. 136, 137) is an attempt to provide a common train of thought in three automatists to account for cross-correspondences on the words 'cup' and 'Diana,' and (in two of them) references to Macbeth. Miss Tanner says: "We got a clew here in the fact that Henry Irving played 'Macbeth' and 'The Cup' in London that winter, though we are not told just when." She doubtless refers to a conjecture of Mr. Piddington's as to association of ideas in one of the scripts. He says (*Proc.*, Vol. XXII., p. 206): "The conjunction of allusions to *Macbeth*, *The Cup*, and a 'Henry' [in Mrs. Holland's script] was, perhaps, due to an association of ideas with Henry Irving, who produced, and acted in, these two plays." "That winter" is an interpolation of Miss Tanner's and, as that winter was 1906-7, and Henry Irving died in 1905, and, I may add, at no time acted in *Macbeth* and *The Cup* in the same year,² is obviously an erroneous one. So that clue fails.

(c) The following is a specimen of Miss Tanner's arguments. On p. 344 she refers to the case of Miss R. seeing the face of Mrs. J. W. in two places nearly or quite at once on the night of Mr. J. W.'s death (*Journal S.P.R.*, Vol. XII., p. 317). Miss R. unfortunately failed to note the experience in writing, though she specially observed the hour, till two days later when she heard of the death. "This," says Miss Tanner, "is an excellent illustration of the defects in all testimony in which the vision is not written out prior to the knowledge of the death. What proof is there that this is not an illusory memory, especially if, as seems to be the case, Miss R. is given to vivid images and feelings of premonition?" (Whence she gets this impression about Miss R.'s tendencies to vivid images, etc., I do not know. Miss R.'s own statement is: "To the best of my belief I have never seen an appearance of any similar kind before.") The case would, of course, have been more cogent if a note had been

¹ See *Proceedings*, Vol. XX., p. 309.

² *The Cup* was produced by Irving at the Lyceum in 1881, and has not been played in London since. *Macbeth* was played by him in 1875 and again in 1888.

made, but even taking Miss Tanner's abridged account, and still more with the details given in the original, it appears to me to be one where illusion of memory is improbable. However, Miss Tanner thinks differently, and having persuaded herself that there probably was illusion of memory, she goes further and actually regards the case as evidence that such illusions are common. She says: "Such a case . . . convinces us that illusions of memory even within a few days of the event may be so common as to invalidate every case except those in which the hallucination is written out in detail at the time and before the corresponding event is known."

(d) Here is another specimen of Miss Tanner's arguments. She refers with well-merited admiration to Mr. Davey's experiments (*Proc.*, Vol. IV.), showing how inaccurate observation and memory of conjuring tricks is. Then, criticising the evidence for apparitions at the time of death, and referring to the paucity of contemporary documents, she says (p. 352): "Does it not seem curious that a committee [the Census Committee] cognisant of Mr. Davey's brilliant demonstration of the transpositions and lapses of memory within even one hour after the event should base a supposedly scientific argument for telepathy on evidence of this sort?" The value of the evidence is of course greatly diminished by absence of contemporary notes. At the same time, the kind of lapse of observation and memory involved in misstatements in the case of accounts of Mr. Davey's conjuring tricks is very different from that in accounts of apparitions at the time of death. For instance, I should unhesitatingly assume Miss Tanner's account of a conjuring trick witnessed but not understood by her to be inaccurate, though given immediately after witnessing it, because I should know that the conjuror had tried to give her false impressions at the time, and because I should feel sure that the numerous small incidents which went to make up the whole occurrence, and to which she had no clue, would tend to get misplaced or forgotten even when observed. But if Miss Tanner told me that Miss Smith called on her at three o'clock on Saturday afternoon I should have no reason to doubt her word; though, of course, if anything of importance turned on the exact day and hour of the call it would be desirable to enquire whether she or others could bring forward corroborative circumstances confirming her recollection.

(e) Here is an instance of Miss Tanner's conjectural explanations (p. 58). At a sitting with Mrs. Piper which Sir Oliver Lodge was managing, and at which he was himself taking notes, a "Mr.

Wilson," deceased, professed through the Phinuit control to send messages to his son, who was not present. The following is an extract from the report:

"... He lives somewhere in your neighbourhood

O. J. L. Yes he does.

and has got a friend named Bradley—a very great friend of his. He thought first of being a doctor. . . ."

The son had never thought of being a doctor, but when the remark was made at the sitting Sir Oliver thought it correctly represented something he had been told by the son. His inference from this, and from the fact that of other statements made by 'Mr. Wilson' those only referring to matters known to Sir Oliver were correct, is that "a great deal of this looks obviously like thought-transference." On this Miss Tanner comments, "Doubtless there was thought-transference, but it was done by Sir Oliver involuntarily betraying his opinion to Phinuit, I would venture to say." Now how does one, when there is no beating about the bush, involuntarily betray an impression of the sort in question? Does Dr. Tanner think that Sir Oliver unconsciously whispered "he thought first of being a doctor" and that Phinuit repeated it after him? Or does she believe that Sir Oliver's contemporary notes are as much abbreviated, or abstracted with a bias, as the accounts of cases in her book? Surely in this case a more plausible alternative hypothesis to telepathy would be that Phinuit made a guess which accidentally coincided with Sir Oliver's idea.

Dr. Tanner gives two chapters to "Telepathy and other Allied Phenomena," and rather strangely says (p. 321) that under the name of telepathy "are grouped all such things as crystal gazing, veridical dreams, death warnings, premonitions that come true, automatic writing, and even spirit communication itself by some." In the first of the two chapters she discusses spontaneous and experimental thought-transference. (I am interested, by the way, to learn that the experiments at Brighton in 1889-90, in which I took a large part, "are now discredited," p. 326. This is news to me.) In the second of the two chapters Miss Tanner discusses the "Census of Hallucinations." It is curious to find her saying after this (p. 365): "The great trouble with the cases for all sorts of telepathy is that it is almost, if not quite, impossible to collect all the negative instances, for that would mean devoting one's time to writing down the thoughts which bring up persons. We cannot even begin to calculate the probabilities in the case until we know something more of the

numbers of negative cases." It was a principal object of the "Census of Hallucinations," to compare the number of coincidental with non-coincidental—positive with negative—hallucinations, and Miss Tanner actually discusses the chapter on recognised apparitions where the proportion of these occurring within twelve hours of the death of the person seen is compared with the proportion of such coincidences that chance alone would give (and shown, of course, enormously to exceed it). It seems possible, however, that she has not altogether understood the object of a calculation which she has certainly failed to follow, and of which she gives an account on p. 350, which is neither correct nor intelligible.

I could multiply instances of inaccuracy and misrepresentation, also of the use of misleading phrases, such as those by which Miss Tanner seems to suggest that "the Psychical Researchers" are collectively responsible for the opinions of any one interested in Psychical Research. But I have, I think, said enough. It is likely enough that the book will impress those who derive their knowledge of the evidence discussed from it alone; but a very different view will be formed by those who are able to check Dr. Tanner's version of the evidence by reference to the original sources. As Dr. Tanner is a professional psychologist, and presumably therefore aims at learning and expounding the truth, the book must be regarded as failing in its object.

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